

REMARKS

In complete response to the Office Action dated November 7, 2005, on the above identified application, reconsideration is respectfully requested.

In this amendment, claims 1-6, 9-23, 25-38, 40-46, 48, and 50-54 have been cancelled and claims 7, 8, 24, 39, 47, 49, 55, and 56 have been amended.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claims 7, 8, 14, and 27-31 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112. In response to the Examiner's rejection, Claim 7 has been amended to add antecedent basis to the "supply of purge gas" limitation of the claim. Consequently, Claim 8, as the dependent from claim 7, is no longer indefinite. Claims 14 and 27- 31 have been deleted. Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner to reconsider this rejection.

Allowable Subject Matter

The Applicants wish to thank the Examiner for denoting certain claims have allowable subject matter. Accordingly, Applicants have deleted claims 1-6, 9-23, 25-38, 40-46, 48, and 50-54 and amended claims 7, 8, 24, 39, 47, 49, 55, and 56 in order to overcome the Examiner's objections and to advance prosecution. The claims have been rewritten in independent form and include all of the limitations of then base claims and in any intervening claims.

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Amendment dated May 5, 2006
Reply to Office Action of November 7, 2005

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, it is believed that the present application now stands in condition for allowance. Early notice to this effect is earnestly solicited. Should the examiner believe a telephone call would expedite the prosecution of the application, he is invited to call the undersigned attorney at the number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

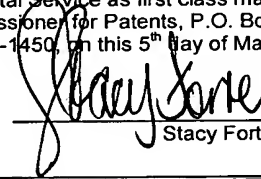


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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the United States Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, on this 5th day of May 2006.


Stacy Forte